



Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group Minutes

Date:	13 January 2021
Venue:	Zoom Conference Call
Steering Group Members Present:	Julia Davies (Chair), Rob Bennett, Sarah Chapman, Andrew Clayden, Mike Dormon, Robin Jewett, Rowan Lloyd, Clare Maynard, Jan Reynolds, Sharon Strutt, Maria Tasker, Gini Trower, Jacqueline Veater, Anne Washbourn, Christina Whellams (Minutes)
In attendance:	9 members of the public 1 representative of Catesby Estates 2 representatives of Websters Estate
1. Apologies:	None received

2. Public Forum

- a. A member of the public referred to Websters recent consultation with local residents on the Netherfield Lane site, and asked whether the Steering Group were aware of their proposals to use more greenbelt land than is in the plan. The resident was concerned that if the land is then sold on to a developer, they could sit on the plot and build a much larger development after a number of years.
- b. A member of the public referred to the AECOM report which is now in the public domain. They reported that in the section of the document 'additional criteria', a comment was made that *"there are some issues with the site assessment as it stands"*. The document continues to state *"potentially ruling out sites at the initial sift without proper justification is an issue and that it should be checked to ensure that the ruling reason for any particular site is justified"*. It also reports *"that although the results may be correct, the process of ruling out sites, the application of criteria and the way the assessment results are presented would benefit from a reworking"* and the recommendation given is that *"a new site assessment is carried out either by the group focusing on the points above or by AECOM"*. The resident felt that there are 4 clear issues pointing out flawed criteria and they were concerned to read Sarah Chapman's recent post on the Stanstead Abbotts Facebook Page stating that *"the steps and the criteria that have been used have been endorsed by AECOM"*. They felt that its very unethical for stuff to be published in the public domain that is untrue.
- c. A member of the public raised the following queries:
 - i) how the Co-op had been identified as the centre of the village, rather than the River Lea or the station, as they felt the centre of Stanstead Abbotts is definitely not the centre of the 3 parishes;
 - ii) Site L in Netherfield Lane which had scored 52 points and was 16th place on the scoring. They asked why this had become the Steering Group's key focus when the scoring was so low, and wanted to understand why site K and L have been scored together, as brownfield and greenbelt sites, when they are not one site;
 - iii) clarification was sought for the site in Marsh Lane which had been excluded early on as it was deemed to be in a flood zone. The area, which will now be built on, is not in the flood zone and they would like to understand why the site had originally been excluded;
 - iv) concern that the field next to St Margaretsbury was sifted out early on in the process, even though the landowner wants to build and it's not in greenbelt but is an agricultural site. There are clearly flaws with the assessment criteria and the Steering Group must start the process again to save our greenbelt sites.
- d. A member of the public made reference to the recent announcement by the Government concerning over-use of greenbelt land. They were interested to know how this feeds through to the NP Steering Groups/Parish Councils, and whether we can use other sites that are not greenbelt in order to meet our target. The Chair reported that the recent announcement applies to future local plans and therefore doesn't relate to the current East Herts plan or our local plan. Jacqueline Veater (JV) added that whilst the Government announcement is good news, the issue we have is that we have considered every viable option.

3. Minutes of the Last Meeting and Matters Arising

- a. The minutes of the last meeting were agreed.
- b. Item 3c) and the first question of the public forum were discussed concerning Netherfield Lane. Originally the larger area had been included within the plan but this was reduced because there were concerns about taking too much greenbelt land. The Steering Group had felt that the boundary needed to be quite tight in order to not exceed our guidelines of 60 units and would look favourably at extending the site if it was clearly for the purposes of additional landscaping and screening of existing houses. The Housing Policy will take into account feedback from the Parish Council, but it should be noted that these are guidelines only and we do not have the power to force developers to stick to a number given.
- c. Nic Fuselli (NF) of Websters was invited to clarify further. He explained that Websters are not looking to build additional houses by having a larger release of the area from the greenbelt and that they want to create a showcase landscaped environment that befits the end of the village. If the release of land is too small then it will compact the development significantly. If they can release what they asked for originally in the response to call for sites, they can place some large buffered areas between Netherfield Lane, residents and the development itself, and the same for the residents at the back of the Roydon Road and the Almshouses, where Baesch Trust are likely to build a horseshoe development in keeping with the existing listed buildings. Websters also own the land the other side of the brownfield site (the industrial area on the left of Netherfield Lane) and land beyond that which is currently rented out for grazing with no plans to release that from the greenbelt. They are considering, for that land, the planting of additional trees and what they can do in environmental terms to reduce their carbon footprint, and then in terms of the future, what they need to do to assist with deforestation and various other factors. Their focus is very much 'more land does NOT mean more houses' and are led by a number of circumstances which dictate the number of houses and the quantity of bedrooms. On the larger site, they are able to accommodate a high percentage of affordable homes - around 40% - with 24 houses out of 60, and for the remaining 36 private homes, they are governed by whether they are 2, 3 or 4 bed homes. In theory, a developer could sit on land but there would be conditions to the sale that require them to fulfil the obligations to the Webster family.
- d. He continued to explain that there is an organisation within the Webster family called the David Webster Charitable Trust – the lighting and property businesses make annual contributions into that trust and fund it fully. The trust has just bought some land in Bedfordshire for the Woodland Trust to plant 40,000 trees and David Webster, the owner of the lighting business, is ensuring ecological issues, environmental issues and renewable energies remain high within their corporate virtues. Websters are due to release some plans that are being put together on the website www.netherfieldlane.co.uk and will show visual representations as to what they are looking to achieve. They are working towards a partnership with developers to ensure that they don't overwrite what Websters have put together, and will commit them to the local NP and the local PC. Profit is not the primary motive and they are working towards leaving a legacy for David Webster and for the village, and to ensure what is created is attractive and is not the normal bolt-on extension that is normally seen. Nothing is cast in stone but to the extent of how they can control it, they will not appoint a developer who will not work with them. They are governed by legislation and can't change it arbitrarily, so are trying to work hard to find something that works for residents.

4. The situation with the Parish Councils and Moving Forward with the Plan

- a. The Chair explained that following the three Parish Councils meeting, there had been a follow up meeting to talk through the necessary change to the criteria and to the housing sites, as recommended by AECOM.
- b. Two Parish Councils were happy to agree to the changes, one of which included the removal of the site behind St Andrew's church. One Parish Council did not approve removal of the site or the new criteria and therefore means that we are continuing with the old criteria until a resolution can be found for all three Parish Council's to be in agreement.

- c. An informal workshop has been organised for Stanstead Abbots Parish Council (SAPC) on Thursday 21 January which will explain the criteria and the steps taken to date. It is a complex and technical process, and by holding this workshop it is hoped this will instil confidence in the Councillors, with the aim of eventually presenting the new criteria and list of sites to them again. It had been hoped that AECOM could chair the workshop but they are not able to attend so a more local Chair is being explored.
- d. A decision needs to be made on the material that is presented to the workshop and that a meeting should be held to discuss further.
Action: Housing Sub-Group
- e. It was reiterated that AECOM do not approve the plan and the final decision is made by East Herts District Council (EHDC). AECOM review what we have done initially, they begin writing their report and discuss it with us, we make changes as we have done, and they send us a final report. The conclusions on page 25 of the AECOM report explain where we are currently and what has been presented to the Parish Councils.
- f. The Chair thanked St Margarets (SMPC) and Great Amwell (GAPC) Parish Councils for their support in contacting SAPC to understand the issues.

5. Finance and Technical Support

- a. MD reported there has been little spend due to Covid restrictions and we are now approaching the end of the financial year so there is likely to be underspend. Any unspent money must be returned, as long as it's not less than £1k, and can then be re-applied for.
- b. Technical Support – the Housing Report has been returned but we are still waiting for a response to the Design Report.
Action: JD to follow up with AECOM
- c. JV reported that we have applied for a Conflict Resolution package through Locality, seeking help for an independent body to assist with the conflict of the lead Parish Council. She explained that SAPC were the lead PC Council when we submitted our area designation, as the other two Parish Councils didn't have the capacity to get involved.

6. Covid and the Consultations

- a. The consultations are currently on hold due to the pandemic. As restrictions may be in place for some time, it was felt that we shouldn't wait until we are able to hold physical meetings which is likely to be around June/July, and instead make use of all the online opportunities that exist. This particular consultation is an informal part of the process, taking place before our statutory regulation 14 consultation, and we could therefore consider extending the proposed 6 weeks consultation.
- b. Webinars were felt as being a good way forward as we could hold a series of topics to present, as well as having information on the website.
- c. Leafleting has previously been mentioned but with current pandemic regulations in place, this would not be possible at the present time. We should however continue to plan for when the restrictions are lifted so that leafleting is then possible.

7. Analysing and Publicising Feedback from Consultations

- a. The Chair reported that she has a meeting next week to talk about possibly resurrecting the Parish Magazine which could allow us to communicate with residents and provide them with feedback on the consultation.
- b. JV explained that it is possible to issue a simple questionnaire with the use of Survey Monkey; an online tool which provides analysis. There would be no separate payment as she currently has a whole year's subscription purchased for another Neighbourhood Plan.
- c. Consideration needs to be given to those who do not have internet access, and it was suggested that we could perhaps offer a telephone service so that residents can ring in. It was also felt that notices around the village would reach out to those walking, and that leaflets could perhaps be left at the pharmacy and the Co-op. Consideration needs to be given to quarantining leaflets for at least 72 hours.

8. Sub-Groups

- a. *Business* – The main area of work has been dealing with the AECOM report and implementing the changes in line with the recommendations, along with preparing for the Parish Council meetings. The sub-group have also been involved in preparing a response to a document submitted by the Netherfield Lane residents, which was sent out at the end of December, and will also be getting together to discuss material for the Parish Council workshop.

Sarah Chapman (SC) addressed the comments raised in the public forum:

- i) The AECOM report – AECOM endorsed the majority of our criteria, pointing out a number of ways in which we could make them more defensible from being attacked by developers. Their site selection was the same as ours.
 - ii) Centre of the village – relates to criteria in our scoring matrix, mostly which are based on planning criteria and were developed to reflect the requests of EHDC. In terms of the Co-op, this related to the criteria for connectivity so the Steering Group considered where all the sites were in relation to the facilities in the village, the area of which is defined by EHDC. The group identified that the main facilities were located on the High Street and the Coop is in the centre, along with the Post Office.
 - iii) Sites – this relates to the site ranking list that was presented to the first three parishes in October 2019. Not much has changed since but a decision was made early on to combine sites L and K as it would enable us to work towards our target, include community/affordable housing and the issue in terms of changing the greenbelt boundary. Site L was originally 16th on the list but was still included within the plan because all sites above it were included or had already been developed.
 - iv) Marsh Lane – was not included as Lee Valley Park would not permit to any building.
 - v) St Margaretsbury field – The land was ruled out because it is not within our settlement boundary, is high-grade agricultural land and would mean coalescence between nearby villages.
- b. *Ecology* – JV is in the process of finalising the policy and will circulate to the sub-group.
- c. *Heritage* – Nothing further to report.
- d. *Business* – JV had provided some comments on the policies. Sharon Strutt (SS) needs to respond and circulate to the sub-group.
- e. *Transport* – Clare Maynard (CM) is analysing the survey that was produced for SAPC. It appears to be focussing on the quarry and also highlights the danger of turning into Netherfield Lane irrespective of whether there is a new development or not. HCC are also carrying out a survey and Julia Witting has been drafting something for Stanstead Abbots to use in a response, so the Chair agreed to forward on to SMPC.

Action: JD
- f. *Design* – Nothing further to report.
- g. *Community Assets* – Jan Reynolds (JR) reported that she is been working on drafting emails to the clerks, for presenting to the Parish Councils, which summarises the areas around the village that we feel should be classed as assets of community value, and asking for their support. We are offering to complete the forms on their behalf for their final approval.

9. AOB

- a. There were no items raised.

10. Date of Next Steering Group

- a. The date of the next meeting will be Wednesday 10 February 2021 at 7.30pm for 7.45pm